

**China University of Political Science and Law  
Summer Course 2015**

**Alexander Bukh  
Senior Lecturer, International Relations Program, VUW**

**Course name: Approaches to International Relations**

This course surveys the fundamental concepts (e.g. state, sovereignty, anarchy, imperialism, international norms) and theoretical debates (e.g. realism, liberalism, constructivism, Marxism, feminism) within International Relations. Subsequently, core issues of contemporary relevance in world affairs are considered (e.g. global governance, security, aid and development, humanitarian intervention, and global civil society).

**Course Outline**

*Class 1-Introduction to Social Sciences*

During this session we will examine the most important characteristics of social sciences and discuss key concepts such as society, causality, structure and agency and types of research.

*Class 2- International Relations as an Academic Discipline*

We will discuss some basic questions about the discipline of International Relations (IR). What is IR? What are the main concepts in IR? What is the 'proper' scope of IR? What should it be? Why do we study IR? How should we study it?

*Class 3 – IR Theory: The Hegemony of Realism and Neo-Realism*

This session is devoted to the dominant theoretical tradition in IR-realism. In the first part of the session we will look into some of the basic concepts of realism such as anarchy, rational actor, relative gains, balance of power and security dilemma. We will

explore the shift from realism to neo-realism and discuss the question of agency and structure. During the second part of the session we will critically examine the way realism is applied in empirical case studies.

*Class 4-IR Theory: Liberalism and Neo-Liberalism (essay proposal due)*

In this session we will examine the main theoretical contender to realist hegemony. In the first part of the session we will look into some of the basic concepts of the liberal tradition such as cooperation, absolute gains, institutions, democratic peace, norms and regimes. In the second part of the session we will critically look into the ways liberalism is applied in IR.

*Class 5- Constructivism*

This session will introduce the constructivist school of IR theory. In the first part of the session we will examine some of the basic concepts of constructivism such as social construction, socialization, identity and ideational structures.

*Class 6-Post-Structuralism*

In this session we will look into the 'critical' constructivist theory and look into its understanding on identity, construction and power.

*Class 7-Gender*

This session will look at the gender approach to IR and explore its theoretical tenets as well as its utility in explaining international relations.

*Class 8- Globalization*

This session will look at the various approaches to globalization and examine the three main schools of thought: hyperglobalists, sceptics and transformationalists.

Reading:

*Class 9- Marxism and Neo-Marxism: Empire and beyond*

In this session we will look into the various ways the IR scholarship (broadly defined) has dealt with the question of the hegemonic role of the US in world affairs.

*Class 10-Soft Power in International Relations*

During this session we will critically examine the notion of “soft power” popularized by Joseph Nye and look into the various ways this concept has been applied in IR scholarship.

*Class 11- The End of History and the Decline of the West*

This class will be devoted to examining the idea of the end of history introduced by Francis Fukuyama in late 1980s and debate about the decline of the West.

*Class 12-Revision*

During this session we will review the main ideas and concepts discussed during this course.